

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 11 SEPTEMBER 2012
title: LEISURE CARD REVIEW
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: COLIN WINTERBOTTOM, LEISURE & SPORTS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform you of the current availability of price concessions extended to certain Ribble Valley residents under the Leisure Card Scheme.
- 1.2 To consider the criteria for eligibility to the scheme and decide upon the format and administration arrangements for its continuation.
- 1.3 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
 - **Community Objectives**
Improving the health of people living and working in our area
Improving the opportunity for young people to participate in recreation and sporting activity
 - **Corporate Priorities**
Improving opportunities for people to access sporting facilities
To ensure a well-managed Council, providing efficient services through identifying customer need

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The availability of activity price concessions has been available to Ribble Valley residents since 2005, in the form of a Freedom Leisure Card which has been issued to the following targeted user groups on production of the necessary proof of eligibility;-
 - 60 years or over
 - Unemployed (Every 3 months re-validation)
 - Income support
 - Housing Benefit
 - Council Tax Benefit
 - Disabled Person
 - Disabled Carer
 - Full-Time Student
 - Family Concession
- 2.2 The price concessions have been available at Ribblesdale Pool and Longridge Leisure Centre/Gym, and have offered admission at a reduction of approximately one third off the normal price.
- 2.3 A small fee has been attached to the provision of a personalised membership card in order to cover the cost of the swipe cards which are necessary for information management as operated by the Gladstone MRM supported system.

- 2.4 The availability of activity concessions is common practice in supporting the objective of enabling equality of access to the Council's leisure facilities and activity programmes, and this Council has operated a concession card scheme for the past twenty years at least.
- 2.5 A comparison of Leisure Card schemes across the East Lancashire districts has been produced (see Borough Leisure Card Background appendix). There is evidence to suggest consistency in making concessions according to;
- Ability to pay identified by recipients of council tax benefit, income support, housing benefit, working tax benefit.
 - Disability identified by recipients of being registered disabled, disability living allowance, incapacity benefit.
 - Student identified by recipient of full time student status
 - Senior Citizen identified by birth certificate.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 Over the duration of the Council's Freedom Card (2005-12), analysis of the different categories of membership reveals that;-
- There have been 1233 memberships in total over the 5 years;
 - There have been a total of 195 memberships that meet the criteria of housing benefit, income support and unemployed;
 - There have been just over 40 memberships relating to disability and disabled carers, and 66 Full time student memberships.

Now that Longridge Sports Centre/Gym and Roefield Leisure Centre are not included in the operation of the scheme, it is only Ribblesdale Pool which will provide reduced admissions on a concessional membership basis.

The income generated from concessions offered at the pool during 2010/2011 comprised of £270 from membership subscriptions and £1407 from activity admissions comprising adults, junior and disabled member concessions, but excluding senior citizens who have a reduced admission fee and take up of membership of the scheme is to purchase 12 for 10 contracts. Therefore, if the concession scheme is no longer extended to unemployed, disabled and family groups, it is estimated that approximately £500 could potentially be raised from charging these people the additional 1/3rd in admission price. However, there is no assurance that people will continue to attend once the concession is removed. The scheme exists to support those who are believed to most require financial assistance in accessing leisure facilities.

- 3.2 The operational management of the current membership card has been possible through the use of a computerised system provided by Gladstone MRM. There have been problems throughout our association with this provider and the software support has not satisfied our expectations on various occasions. The maintenance contract for the Gladstone system was cancelled as part of the approved service review savings, approved in November 2011, with a view to pursuing an alternative way of operating a membership scheme. The cost of maintaining the system is no longer sustainable given the requirement is for one site; (Ribblesdale Pool), meaning the capacity and functionality provided by the Gladstone system is no longer appropriate.

The post of Leisure Card Officer was introduced specifically to co-ordinate and administrate the operation of the leisure card, and this Committee approved the termination of this post in December 2011, as part of the measures necessary to realise the savings as part of the budget review process. Assuming that Members wish to continue delivery of the leisure card scheme, then it is proposed that it will be co-ordinated by the pool management and staff.

The options available are identified as;

- (a) Return to a completely manual administrative system of recording personal membership details; (as was the case pre-Gladstone System), on a database and issuing identity cards produced in-house for presenting at the Pool reception on entry.

It must be emphasised that there are other management functions supported by the Gladstone System including; Financial and usage reporting information, the recording of booking information and preparation of information for raising invoices. The operation of contract based incentives in an attempt to increase swimming attendances. It may also be possible to introduce manual systems to replace these functions, but it is anticipated that this will increase the administrative burden upon site staff and reduce the quality of information required for monitoring and business purposes. The operation has already embraced the Leisure Card coordination since the departure of the Leisure Card designated officer last year.

- (b) Adopting a similar membership-based system to the present one, but which is;
 - More suited to the current specific business requirements of the Pool;
 - More cost effective;
 - Improved in terms of management system support

3.3 In order to guide the future delivery of a Leisure Card scheme for Ribble Valley members are requested to consider the following;

- Changes to the concession availability scheme as set out in 2.1;
- Within the Income Support category it is proposed to include people in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based) and Employment and Support Allowance (Income related);
- Amend the concession for those 60 or over. As the government is increasing the pension age incrementally over the next few decades those in receipt of the state pension should be the criteria for eligibility;
- Inclusion of Exercise Referral into the overall scheme. Clients identified on the scheme can attend at a reduced rate during public swimming times or at specific programmed Swimming for Health sessions;
- There is no fee for the membership card if it is decided to go with in-house produced manual system;
- Swimming lessons and exercise classes are not available within this scheme.

The concessions are only available at Ribblesdale Pool as this is the only facility under Council control.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- **Resources** – There would be a cost in providing a cash replacement receipting system, which satisfies the Council's financial regulations. It would be necessary to source an appropriate till and there will be respective maintenance and material support costs to keep it operative.

Alternative leisure management software is being explored by the Council's IT section, and it is proposed to find a more cost effective solution and the cost will be met from within the current Pool revenue budget.

- **Technical, Environmental and Legal** – An appropriate system which meets the service requirements at the pool currently and that anticipated in the future, will be undertaken in conjunction with IT section.
- **Political** – No implications identified.
- **Reputation** – The revision process and continuity of a concession scheme for target members across the Borough will enhance the reputation as well as encouraging participation in swimming.
- **Equality & Diversity** – This scheme aims to offer equal opportunity of access to its Swimming Pool.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Considers the contents of this report and accepts the proposal to continue with the operation of a Leisure Card scheme, that incorporates the amendments as identified in 4.5.
- 5.2 Considers the management of the Leisure Card and other Pool management functions, and approves that an alternative; (identified in 4.4), be implemented which satisfies the Pool operational and business administration requirements.

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APPENDIX

Borough	Name of card	Concessions	Discount	Price	Use of Facilities	Special Packages	Cross-Authority	Future Plans
Hyndburn	Leisure Activity Passport	JSA, income support, incapacity benefit, council tax benefit, housing benefit, working tax benefit, registered disabled, disability living allowance, severe disablement allowance, students 16+ (those that are educated in Hyndburn and those that live there), age 60+	Depends on the activity. Up to 60% discount	£2 every 6 months, £2.50 for a family LAP	Wet, dry, sessions/classes		No	Under review
Burnley	Passport to Leisure	Working tax credit, pension credit, income support, job seekers allowance		Free	Wet, dry, sessions/classes		No	No change
Blackburn	BeeZ Card	Housing benefit, council tax benefit, income support, job seekers allowance, employment and support allowance, pension credit, incapacity credit,	30% off cost of casual activities at off peak times (8.30am-4.30pm) 10% off swimming lessons also	Free for people that live, work, are educated or have a GP in BwD Can buy a n	Wet, dry, sessions/classes		People that have a top rate monthly DD gym membership can show their Beez	No

		disability living allowance		adult card for £13, £7 juniors/OAP			card and use other LA facilities that are part of the Active Network at no extra charge	
Pendle	Get Active Pass	Working tax credit, pension credit, disabled persons tax credit, income support, employment support allowance, disability living allowance, jobseekers allowance	Adults £2.50 for all activities, £1.50 for OAPS/children	Free	Wet, dry, sessions/classes		No change	
Rosendale	Passport to Active Living	Income support, working families tax credit, housing benefit, jobseekers allowance, incapacity benefit, aged 60+ or a dependent of any of the above	£1.60 for non coached activities 30% off coached activities/sessions	£2 per year £5 for 3 years for OAP's	Wet, dry, sessions/classes, sport development activities. Can only use up to 6pm on weekdays		No	No change

Ribble Valley	Freedom Leisure Card	60 years or over, unemployed, income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit, disabled person, disabled carer, full time student	Up to 40% discount on the price of a standard swim	Concessionary membership £2.80, standard card £5.60	Wet, dry, sessions/classes	12 for 10 swimming offer		Under review